

How ANC Gauteng lost the plot

Lower number of votes was caused by leaders more interested in creating mutual assistance fraternities

Dominic Tweedie, The New Age, Johannesburg, 16 May 2014

The results of last week's national election in South Africa present a simple picture - The African National Congress (ANC) has achieved a decisive win.

The ANC won 11 436 921 votes, 62% of the total, in support of its comprehensive manifesto outlining its National Development Plan, and for a radical second phase of the national democratic revolution. The people have spoken. South Africa's course is set, for now.

For four months, from the ANC's Anniversary Statement in early January, to the Siyanqoba Rally in early May, the ANC's message has been consistent, and it has been understood. The overall result is a clear and unequivocal majority for the ANC, and for its programme.

There is, however, a dark side to this picture. This article examines the election results in more detail, with a view to what may happen in subsequent elections, beginning with the Municipal Elections scheduled for 2016.

In four out of the nine Provinces, including the Western Cape, the ANC actually gained votes in 2014 as compared with the previous similar election in 2009.

In another four Provinces, the ANC majority was slightly reduced in 2014, but was still way above two-thirds of the votes cast in those provinces.

Only in the ninth Province – Gauteng – is the report card less than positive from the ANC point of view. It is Gauteng's terrible performance that accounts for most of the drop in countrywide support for the ANC from about 66% overall in 2009, to 62% now.

With just over 6 million, Gauteng is by nearly one million registered voters, the largest province, over the next biggest (KZN). The ANC share of the ballot in Gauteng dropped by 10%, to 55%.

Worse than that, from the ANC point of view, the two most important Metros in the country – South Africa's administrative and business capitals, Tshwane and Johannesburg, are clearly in the "relegation zone", with 51% and 54% majorities, respectively.

Gauteng's third major Metro, the vast East Rand industrial heartland called Ekurhuleni, is also now in play with just over 56%.

A considerably smaller swing than what we have seen this time can take these three Metros out of ANC control, or else force the ANC into an unwanted coalition with a hostile partner in the shape of the Democratic Alliance (DA) or the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).

There are no other likely contenders. In Gauteng, we have a three-horse race.

These potential upsets can happen in the municipal elections within two years. Indeed, unless the ANC is able to turn the tide around - as it has done in Cape Town - the loss of Tshwane, Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni in 2016 is a racing certainty. To say otherwise is to be in denial.

Unfortunately for the ANC, its Gauteng Province does appear to be in that condition. All sorts of excuses are being offered to the media, officially and unofficially, by ANC members anxious to save their careers. But excuses will not turn the electoral tide for the ANC. Only remedying its weaknesses will help it.

What are these weaknesses?

Generally, the ANC branches in the three giant metros of Gauteng have become little more than a career path for highly ambitious office seekers. As a consequence, factions have developed which are not ideological, but are more like mutual-assistance fraternities, bordering on gangs. The most successful of these have become arrogant, and consequently, unattractive to voters.

The ruling clique in the Gauteng ANC is overconfident to the extent of showing disrespect to the ANC at national level, and in public, too.

From vacating their seats at the Mangaung National Conference in December 2012, as seen on TV, to organising the public booing of the President of the ANC at the FNB Stadium, not once but twice, to refusing to use the President's image on T-shirts in the election, the Gauteng ANC has flaunted its defiance.

But, as the national results clearly show, it was not the President, or the ANC nationally that was punished by the electorate.

Instead, it was the Gauteng ANC that lost a serious number of votes, pulled down the ANC's national total, and put its own province in jeopardy.

Can the Gauteng ANC, ocean-like, clean itself in time to keep what it has so nearly lost?

Regional and Provincial Conferences are scheduled to take place this year, but with the branch leaderships being in their current condition of nepotism, there is little prospect of change. Most likely, the Gauteng ANC will go into battle in 2016 led by the same disloyal generals who failed it so conspicuously in 2014.

ANC democracy will have to be restored from the ground up.

That only happens when somebody gets on and does it.

Alliance partners in the SACP, and from within COSATU, will do their best to strengthen the cause of the ANC and to rescue it from the impending disaster, as they did in this year's elections. Without their efforts, the Gauteng result was going to be worse. The ANC could have lost the province, already.

Of course, if it is not hit, the ANC will not fall. Who can hit it? The DA gained 7% in the 2014 elections that they did not have in 2009, while Cope was effectively wiped out.

Some are predicting that the same kind of infighting that destroyed Cope, will now destroy its replacement, the EFF, which got 10% in Gauteng. That is not a foregone conclusion. So far, it is the DA which is looking more like the next victim of self-inflicted implosion.

The EFF is for the time being a serious contender in Gauteng. A quick look at the election results shows that as much as 36% of the EFF's electoral support in the country – 420,000 votes out of 1, 169,000 – were gathered in the same three marginal Gauteng Metros of Tshwane, Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni. These votes were gathered by organised structures of the EFF.

The EFF is led by clownish millionaires dressed up as mock Che Guevara-like characters from a cheap video production.

It has no internal democracy to speak of. The EFF is aiming to surpass “tenderpreneurship”, and install oligarchy in South Africa. The EFF is an obvious, living lie; bogus, fraudulent, demagogic and fascist. Unfortunately, none of these things mean that the EFF cannot increase its electoral support.

The EFF is organised as well as the ANC. It is a top-down hierarchy, but it works. The ANC can be much stronger than the EFF, when its democratic branches are working. Unlike the EFF, the ANC does not work well as a command structure.

The ANC only works well when it remembers its own slogan: Power, to the People!

This is how the contest is shaping up for 2016. This contest has already begun.

- *Dominic Tweedie is a member of the Gauteng Provincial Executive Committee of the South African Communist Party. This article is written in his personal capacity.*

Course: Induction

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